

**WASHINGTON**— Florida’s 29-member congressional delegation – the third largest in Congress – met today for the first time in three years under the bipartisan leadership of Co-Chairmen Reps. Vern Buchanan and Alcee Hastings to discuss the economic importance of the state’s 15 seaports.

Growing Florida’s exports and creating new jobs was the focus of today’s meeting hosted by the two newly-elected chairmen. Representatives from Florida’s deepwater seaports addressed the 16-member panel on the need to expand Florida’s port industry and increase America’s ability to compete in the global marketplace.

“Florida’s 15 public seaports support 550,000 jobs and produce \$66 billion in annual economic activity to the region,” said Buchanan, who also serves on the House Ways & Means Subcommittee on Trade. “Port Manatee in my congressional district – the closest deepwater seaport to the Panama Canal – generates more than 24,000 jobs. If we continue to expand our exports, it will help Florida’s economy as we send our goods, services and products to people around the world. The global marketplace will be the new battlefield of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and we need to make sure that America is up to the challenge.”

Representatives from six of Florida’s largest seaports praised the delegation for making trade a top priority, noting that 42% of all U.S. jobs are connected to international trade. Guest speakers included Carlos Buqueras, Executive Director of Port Manatee; Roy Schleicher, CEO Port of Jacksonville; Stanley Payne, CEO of Port Canaveral; Bill Johnson, Director of Port Miami; Steve Cernak, CEO and Director of Port Everglades; Paul Anderson, Tampa Port Director.

“Port Manatee is ideally positioned to expand International trade related job opportunities in Manatee County,” said Buqueras, Executive Director of Port Manatee. “With over \$ 2.3 billion in regional economic impact including more than 24,000 jobs, it's essential that we continue to invest in the economic engine that Port Manatee brings to our economy.”

As the third largest congressional delegation in the U.S. House of Representatives, Buchanan said today’s meeting proves that Florida can set the tone for what needs to be done to restore common sense and civility to Washington.

“At a time when America faces unprecedented challenges, it is imperative that Washington put aside the poisonous rhetoric in favor of common-sense policies that move our state, our

economy and our country forward,” said Buchanan. “Some

people argue that it’s not possible to reshape the dialogue to a more public-spirited approach, but I believe that the Florida Congressional delegation can lead by example – working together to do what’s right.”

“Thank you Mr. Chairman and co-chairman for bringing us back together as a bipartisan delegation,” said Congresswoman Debbie Wasserman Schultz, D-FL.

Members of the Florida delegation who attended this morning’s meeting include: Rep. John Mica, Rep. Kathy Castor, Rep. Steve Southerland, Rep. Lois Frankel, Rep. Ted Yoho, Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz, Rep. Bill Posey, Rep. Alan Grayson, Rep. Dan Webster, Rep. Ted Deutch, Rep. Dennis Ross, Rep. Frederica Wilson, Rep. Rich Nugent, Rep. Corrine Brown.